

by GRETCHEN PHILLIPS, Staff writer    U.S. Rep. Steny H. Hoyer visited the College of Southern Maryland's Center for Trades and Energy Training and said the center's efforts prove that many in the area are working hard to make it in America.

Hoyer (D-Md., 5th), the House minority whip, toured the Waldorf facility Monday before engaging in a roundtable discussion with students, staff and employers on workforce development and job training.

During the tour, Hoyer visited laboratories designed for learning welding, electrical, carpentry and heating, ventilation and air-conditioning trades.

In the HVAC lab, Hoyer spoke with several students ranging in age from late teens to late 30s.

Hoyer told students that when he grew up, cars didn't have air conditioning, but if a car's air conditioner goes out today, it's considered a hardship.

"If it goes out, we want one of you guys on the job right away," he said.

The CTET in Waldorf offers noncredit continuing education courses for trades, advanced skills trainings and apprenticeship programs. Karen Smith Hupp, spokeswoman for the college, said in a previous interview that the CTET has agreements with organizations such as the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council of Carpenters, through which CSM students are taught the MARCC apprenticeship curriculum. Then, those students are eligible for preferred entry and advancement into that union's apprenticeship program.

Local businesses such as Chaney Enterprises, The St. Charles Cos. and Constellation Energy have donated thousands of dollars in equipment and funds to help get students prepared for careers, according to information provided by the college.

Hoyer said Monday that companies can save money by allowing programs such as the one at CSM to train students as opposed to the company providing the training.

Hoyer said providing such training is the basis for the Democratic Party's Make It in America agenda, which he explained in a statement aims to "create jobs and grow the economy by investing in education, innovation and creating the conditions for businesses to launch and expand."

Investing in education for trades, Hoyer said, might be the direction Americans need to go.

Currently, Hoyer said there is a lot of emphasis on everyone going to college.

"If the message we send is everybody must go to college, we're going to have a lot of unemployed college graduates," Hoyer said.

CSM President Bradley M. Gottfried said the college sought the \$1 million grant from the Department of Labor to build the CTET building, which opened in 2009, exactly for that reason.

Gottfried said CSM staff believes that college is not for everyone, and many need a place to go to seek training for trade jobs.

Erica Varesko, 19, of Leonardtown is an electrician's apprentice who is currently in her second year taking electrical classes with CSM's Electrical Boot Camp program and in her first year of an apprenticeship at Naval Support Facility in Dahlgren, Va.

Varesko said during the roundtable discussion that she never thought of herself being in a trade as a high school student, though she always knew she liked working with her hands.

Thinking college as the way to go, “I was going for business in college, then I started the trade, and it’s the best thing that happened to me.”

High school students, she said, need to know that a trade is a great path to take.

Frank Guertler, director of CTET, said it is important to get the word out that there is integrity in working with one’s hands.

“When is the last time you’ve seen a poor plumber?” he asked.

Guertler said during the tour, “We don’t have a job shortage, we have a talent shortage.”

Charles County Commissioner Ken Robinson (D) said, “I think it’s clear that what CSM is doing here is very much needed.”

Hoyer agreed, saying that people should know that there is dignity in going into a trade and that training and educating folks here in America, and getting things made right here in America, is the way to go.

Before leaving the HVAC classroom Monday, Hoyer thanked the students for allowing him to visit and for committing to a program for a career working with their hands.

“Thank you for what you are doing. You are making our county, state and country better so we can make it in America,” Hoyer said.